



United States Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
WHITE RIVER
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Three Public Scoping Meetings for White River National Wildlife Refuge Proposed Expansion

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will host three public scoping meetings to gather input on a proposal to increase the size of the acquisition boundary for White River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in eastern Arkansas. If approved, the acquisition boundary for the refuge would increase by 125,349 acres, for a total acquisition boundary of 297,806 acres in Desha, Monroe, and Phillips Counties, Arkansas, and Bolivar County, Mississippi. The Service would be able to purchase land within this acquisition boundary from **willing sellers only**. An acquisition boundary for a national wildlife refuge is entirely **non-regulatory and non-restrictive**, and if approved, the Service would acquire land from **willing sellers only**.

The Service is inviting input from local and state governments, non-governmental organizations, affected landowners, a variety of partners, and the public regarding the proposal to expand the acquisition boundary.

White River NWR currently contains approximately 160,756 acres of fee-title lands. It is managed primarily for wintering waterfowl, neo-tropical songbirds, an array of fish and mussel species, black bear, and other native species of wildlife. Earlier this year, the White River watershed was designated as the country's second National Blueway by the U.S. Department of Interior, with support from the State of Arkansas, local governments and businesses. The watershed was chosen because of its national significance, as well as its recreational, economic, cultural and ecological assets.

"We look forward to hearing from our neighbors and the public about this exciting proposal," said Keith Weaver, Project Leader for the White River NWR and Central Arkansas NWR Complex. "There are a number of willing sellers located outside the current acquisition boundary that are unable to sell their land to the Service. This proposal would provide them that opportunity and help create an even better refuge for wildlife and for the public to enjoy."

The public meetings are scheduled for:

- Monday, May 13, 2013
6-8 p.m.
Mid-Delta Center (Across from the Library)
245 Madison Street
Clarendon, AR 72029
- Tuesday, May 14, 2013

6-8 p.m.

Phillips Community College (Located off Highway 165 near DeWitt High School)
1210 Rice Belt Avenue
DeWitt, AR 72042

Thursday, May 16, 2013

6-8 p.m.

Dumas Community Center (Behind Days Inn and McDonalds in Dumas)
18 Belmont Street
Dumas, AR 71639

If approved, the Service will draw funding for this land acquisition primarily from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These funds are not derived from traditional tax revenues, but are collected from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges, and import duties on arms and ammunition (Migratory Bird Conservation Fund), and from the sale of offshore oil leases (Land and Water Conservation Fund). The money is intended for land conservation.

In addition to providing increased opportunities for willing sellers, Weaver said this proposed expansion will conserve the southern end of the Big Woods of Arkansas for future generations, restore and enhance wildlife habitats for a diversity of migratory and resident species, improve water quality, and provide additional public access and wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation and photography. "Additionally, increased visitation to new refuge lands will benefit local businesses from increased demands and sales of products and services," Weaver said.

Public comments will be used to guide the Service through the next step in the planning process, which is development of a Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment. From May through July 2013, the Service will develop and analyze alternatives for the expansion, including specific locations and management options. The public will have a chance to review and comment on those alternatives as early as August. The planning team expects to send the Director of the Service a final plan for approval by winter 2013.

This proposal supports the wildlife conservation goals of the States of Arkansas and Mississippi, and complements the States' landscape conservation efforts. The proposal also supports national conservation initiatives for ducks, geese and other migratory birds.

Through June 17, 2013, comments on the proposal may be provided by:

- E-mailing whiteriverexpansion@fws.gov. Please include "White River NWR Acquisition Boundary" in the subject line.
- Mailing to Tina Chouinard, Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 49 Plainsbrook Place, Jackson, TN 38305, or Fax to 731/664-1566.
- Attending a public scoping meeting and providing written or verbal comments.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov> and <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>.

****The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to providing access to these meeting for all participants. Persons needing reasonable accommodations in order to attend and participate in any of these meetings should contact Tina at 731-432-0981 or tina_chouinard@fws.gov. In order to allow sufficient time to process requests, please contact us for assistance by close of business May 10, 2013.****